

EUGENIC MEASURES IN THE THIRD REICH*

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I F I venture to read a paper in English to an English audience I want first to apologize for my boldness to do so as a foreigner. Further I owe you an explanation as to how my humble person might be a kind of mediator between English and German eugenics, and why therefore I seem to be entitled to give here in England a lecture on the subject "Eugenic Measures in the Third Reich." You all or most of you know the little but important and masterful book *What is Eugenics?* by our honorary president, Major Leonard Darwin. This book I had the privilege to translate into German; the translation was published in 1931 under the title *Was ist Eugenik?* and proved a great success. I translated also other eugenic books and articles from the English into the German language, and was a delegate of an Austrian Eugenic Organization to the International Federation of Eugenic Organizations. It is this association with eugenics that emboldens me to crave your indulgence on this occasion.

Before entering into the details of recent German legislation, I want to explain what to me seems to be the fundamental difference between the German and the English conception of eugenics. You know Galton's definition, that "Eugenics is the science which deals with all influences which improve the inborn qualities of a race, also those that develop them to the utmost advantage." Before the Third Reich it was also clear in Germany that "race" here was not used in the anthropological sense. Thus, Fritz Lenz, a pioneer of eugenics in Germany (and now professor of Eugenics at the Berlin University), said: "To influence in a favourable sense the hereditary character of a population is the task of racial hygiene in the stricter sense, being a hygiene of the hereditary characters" (1931). Still clearer is the formulation by Grotjahn: "Eugenics is an

objective science, i.e. applicable to each group of individuals connected with each other by procreation, without any dependence on race in the anthropological sense of the word to which this group belongs" (1926). Now, let me quote Adolf Hitler: "The national state has to put race into the centre of life and to care for its purity." * And: "The state is only the means to an end, this end being the preservation of the racial existence of men." † And: "The quality of a state cannot be valued according to the civilisatory height or the power of this state within the rest of the world, but only according to how its organization works in favour for its own nation." ‡ And: "Who speaks of a mission of the German nation on the earth must know that it can only consist in the formation of a state which sees its highest task in the preservation and the promotion of the most noble portions of our nation, even of the whole of mankind, which are still intact." §

When this bible of present day Germany speaks so, the sense of race and the sense of eugenics therefore are totally altered. Race is the Nordic race in the anthropological sense, or at least the "German race," although such a thing does not exist; and eugenics—or as it is exclusively called in the Third Reich, "racial hygiene"—is only the science concerned with the promotion of the German nation or the Nordic race. By this restriction the German "Rassenhygiene" excludes itself totally from what is called, internationally, eugenics.

Among the legal measures introduced by the Third Reich in connection with eugenics the first, and one of the most conspicuous, was the *Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Disease of July 14th, 1933*. As you know—for a translation of this law was published in

* Substance of a paper read at a meeting of the *Eugenics Society* on Tuesday, January 17th.

* *Mein Kampf*, 16th ed., 1932, p. 446.

† *Ibid*, p. 433. ‡ *Ibid*, p. 435. § *Ibid*, p. 439.

the EUGENICS REVIEW *—the essential items are the following: Anyone who is hereditarily ailing may be made barren (sterilized) by surgical operation, if in the experience of medical science it is with great probability to be expected that his progeny will suffer from severe bodily or mental hereditary disorders. Hereditarily ailing in the sense of this law is anyone who suffers from one of the following diseases: (1) congenital feeble-mindedness, (2) schizophrenia, (3) periodic (manic-depressive) insanity, (4) inherited epilepsy, (5) inherited St. Vitus's dance (Huntington's chorea), (6) inherited blindness, (7) inherited deafness, (8) severe inherited physical malformation. Further, anyone suffering from severe alcoholism may be sterilized. Competent to make the proposal is the person who is to be sterilized, but in the case of irresponsibility or incapacity of this person the proposer is the legal representative, further the medical officer of health, and for the inmates of a hospital, institution or prison, its director.

So the sterilization is a compulsory, not a voluntary measure. Before the Third Reich all the experts were agreed about the fact that the experiences of science were still not sufficient to grant such a measure; it was the political issue which made them change their mind.

Another step which to the German legislation seems to be a eugenic measure, which, indeed, is such a one from the standpoint which I explained in the beginning of my paper but would not be considered so in this country, was the *Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour of September 15th, 1935*, forbidding marriage and sexual intercourse between Jews and citizens of German or related blood and containing the famous regulation that Jews are forbidden to employ in their households female citizens of German or related blood under the age of 45 years. Every German author on eugenics considers this a eugenic law.

Very important is the *Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German*

*Nation (Marriage Health Law) of October 18th, 1935.** It states that a marriage must not be contracted if either of the partners (a) is suffering from a transmissible disease, or (b) has been declared incapable of managing his or her affairs and placed under the provisional care of a guardian, or (c) is suffering from a mental trouble which makes the marriage undesirable in the interests of the community, or (d) is suffering from a "hereditary disease" in the sense in which the term is used in the Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Disease. Before a marriage is contracted the engaged persons have to produce a certificate from the health office to the effect that they are not subject to any of these disabilities. Such a pre-nuptial health certificate was always a demand of many eugenicists and seems to be a very important measure in the interests of eugenics, if applied in the right sense. Rightly, a semi-official article in the *Völkische Beobachter* (the official party paper) stated: "Before the enactment of this law persons who on account of their weak-mindedness, prodigality or alcoholism had been declared incapable of managing their affairs were allowed to marry with the consent of their legal guardian. However, it is against the interests of the national community that such persons should marry. Further there are persons who suffer from mental troubles but who for some reason or other have not yet been declared incapable of managing their own affairs, and others who in consequence of pathological heredity have become criminals. It is obvious that the state must not leave to them the responsibility for the foundation of a family. The present law is a necessary complement to the previous law for the prevention of hereditary disease. The purpose of marriage being the production of healthy children, it is morally unjust to bind a healthy, reproductive individual to a sterilized one. On the other hand, there is no objection against two barren individuals entering into a life-community."

* 1933, 25, 179.

* An English translation by myself was published in *Marriage Hygiene* in 1936 (p. 372).

But as the certificate to be produced before the marriage is contracted is granted by the health office (advisory office for hereditary and racial problems) there is a certain danger as to the proper use of the law. Again here the fundamental difference between eugenics and "racial hygiene" might produce the denial of such a certificate in cases in which from the genuine eugenical standpoint no objection could be raised.

The two laws for the prevention of hereditary disease and for the protection of the hereditary health of the German nation are the most important measures of negative eugenics in the Third Reich, i.e., such measures as should prevent the production of undesirable descendants. The most important measure to increase the number of children of parents whose constitutional health seems to guarantee healthy descendants is the *Law for the Promotion of Marriages* (Section V of the Law for the diminution of unemployment of June 1st, 1933, altered by the Law of March 28th, 1934).

According to this law the national government granted marriage loans up to 1,000 marks to young people who wanted to marry, but would have been unable to marry without this help. From August 1st, 1933, to the end of February, 1934, about 200,000 such loans were granted of an average amount of 620 marks. The purpose of the law was not only to promote marriages and the production of descendants—the official motivation of the law estimated an increase of marriages of 200,000 a year—but also a decrease of unemployment by those increased marriages. One of the conditions for the granting of a marriage loan was that the prospective bride had to give up the paid job in which she was employed up to the time of marriage. (This condition was dropped on October 1st, 1937.)

Moreover, furniture, utensils, linen and the other requirements of the newly married couple and their prospective children were intended to decrease unemployment by the increase in work necessary to supply these

requirements. The loans are to be refunded in amounts equivalent to 1 per cent. per month without interest; e.g. for a loan of 1,000 marks, 10 marks are to be refunded every month to the Government. An additional decree of September 15th, 1935, altered by the decree of August 31st, 1937, introduced the granting of child premiums for families who had to bring up children after the fourth child. Such child premiums are either paid once up to 100 marks for each child after the fourth, or they are regular payments of 10 marks per month for each child after the fourth.

After having explained the importance of these three measures—the *Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Disease*, the *Law for the Protection of the Hereditary Health of the German Nation*, and the *Law for the Promotion of Marriages*, to give you an idea of the German conception of racial hygiene and to justify my argument at the beginning of this paper, I want to quote from an article written by two of the most prominent German eugenicists, Alfred Ploetz and Ernst Rüdin, on what seem to them to be some of the eugenic consequences attained in Germany since the Führer took power on January 30th, 1933.*

They summarize these as follows:

Education of Germany's young people.

Repression of the Jewish portion of the population.

Decrease of unemployment.

Safeguarding of the nation in its racial climbing-up by withdrawal from the League of Nations, declaring null and void the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain,

by occupation of the Rhine District, by the German-Japanese-Italian agreement against communism,

by the creation of the German-Italian axis, by the re-union of Austria with Germany, and so creating Greater Germany.

I leave it entirely to you to decide how far these measures may justly be called eugenic.

* *Archiv für Rassen- und Gesellschafts-Biologie*, 1938, 32, 185.